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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council

Note by the President of the General Assembly

By its resolution 65/285 of 29 June 2011, entitled "Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council", the General Assembly decided to review further the implementation of resolution 61/16 at its sixty-seventh session. In my letters dated 29 November 2012 and 18 March 2013, I appointed Jan Grauls, later replaced by Bénédicte Frankinet, Permanent Representative of Belgium, and George Talbot, Permanent Representative of Guyana, to serve as Co-facilitators for that further review.

Member States will recall that the final report and recommendations on the review of the implementation of resolution 61/16 at the sixty-fifth session was circulated in the annex to document A/65/866.

I have the honour to transmit herewith the final report and recommendations on the further review at the sixty-seventh session of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (see annex).

The report includes draft elements for a resolution on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council, to be considered by the General Assembly. As noted in my letter circulating the report, dated 15 May 2013, I have asked the Co-facilitators to continue their work and carry out consultations on the draft resolution.

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Annex

Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council

Report of the Co-facilitators, May 2013

A. Introduction

1. The President of the General Assembly appointed Jan Grauls, later replaced by Bénédicte Frankinet, Permanent Representative of Belgium, and George Talbot, Permanent Representative of Guyana, as Co-facilitators of the process for the further review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council.

2. In that connection, it should be recalled that in paragraph 155 of the World Summit outcome document, Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the role that the Charter of the United Nations and the General Assembly have vested in the Economic and Social Council, recognizing the need for a more effective Council as a principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development and related matters, as well as for implementation of the international development goals agreed at the major United Nations conferences and summits, including the Millennium Development Goals.

3. More recently, in paragraph 83 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, "The future we want", Heads of State and Government committed to strengthen the Council within its mandate under the Charter, as a principal organ in the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields and recognized the key role of the Council in achieving a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development.

4. The current review must therefore be positioned in the context of the follow-up to the Conference outcome and the unfolding elaboration of a post-2015 development framework. Moreover, the review takes place at a time of significant changes in the broader global development cooperation environment, notably the changing nature of development challenges, the growth of new institutional actors, the emergence of new centres of economic dynamism and the transformation of the relationship among States, markets and individuals, all of which have important implications for the work of the United Nations development system.

5. In pursuit of the commitment to continue to strengthen the Economic and Social Council, and in fulfilment of this mandate, the Co-facilitators conducted seven open-ended informal consultations with Member States between 14 December 2012 and 26 February 2013. To facilitate the discussions, the Co-facilitators provided several "food for thought" and one "food for progress" conference room papers as well as a diagram of a possible timeline. By its resolution 2012/30, the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a report containing proposals for strengthening the Council; that report, entitled "Implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council"

(A/67/736-E/2013/7) was provided as an input to the discussions. Additionally, a number of bilateral consultations were conducted that also fed into the review process.

B. General objective, context and scope of the review

6. The general objective of the informal consultations was to ascertain the views of States members of the United Nations on the further implementation of resolution 61/16 and on charting the future course for the work of the Council in response to the mandates contained in paragraphs 82 and 83 of the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

7. The consultations were undertaken against the backdrop of several related processes taking place in the General Assembly. These include the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals; the informal consultations of the plenary of the General Assembly to define the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum; the intergovernmental expert group on sustainable development financing; and the consultations under way on the elaboration of a post-2015 development framework. Member States emphasized the necessity of a coherent approach to the strengthening of the Council with respect to these other processes. In that regard, the Council should also be seen as a system.

C. A Vision for the future

8. This is not the first time that the reform of the Council has been on the Organization's agenda. Many attempts have been undertaken, often with mixed results. There is a general sense within the United Nations membership that the Council's relevance as a principal United Nations organ has diminished over the years.

9. As a result, a new transformative vision is needed to allow the Council to live up to expectations again and make full use of its potential by:

- Capturing trends and global challenges that are of interest across the United Nations system.
- Producing more real added value and defining its own niche.
- Attracting the right stakeholders.
- Being a genuine thought leader, offering recommendations and promoting policy consensus on economic, social and environmental issues in the context of sustainable development.
- Acting as a convening hub where the wider United Nations development system, together with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other stakeholders can debate, cooperate and enrich each other's work, taking into account the respective mandates and responsibilities.
- Coordinating different bodies and institutions and bringing greater coherence and collective thinking within the United Nations system.
- Proactively supporting the implementation and follow-up of sustainable development and the post-2015 development agenda.

10. A more relevant Council could greatly enhance the visibility and influence of the United Nations in those areas.

D. Why success can be achieved this time: General trends from the debate

11. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development reconfirmed the important role of the Council in the integration of the three dimensions (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development and the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the major United Nations conferences in that regard. It was also agreed at the Conference that poverty eradication and sustainability go hand in hand. In this context, the multilateral system is faced with a new post-2015 development landscape marked by a number of emerging challenges and opportunities. Against this backdrop, the strengthening of the Council as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/16, comes at a very opportune juncture.

12. With respect to improving the relevance of the Council, a number of general trends emerged from the consultation process, as follows:

- Need for a more focused and relevant Council agenda with real and distinctive added value.
- Desirability of having a well-chosen main theme, connected to real world issues, to be taken up by all relevant parts of the Council system,[1] thus better consolidating the specific know-how available within the Council architecture and promoting interlinkages and synergies.
- Readiness to shift from searching for structural coherence (along institutional lines) to "issue coherence" (depending on the theme and the different players involved) in setting the agenda of the Council.
- Need to make full use of the Council's convening power and develop it as a forum where the wider United Nations development system, together with the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and other stakeholders, can debate, cooperate and enrich each other's work.
- Promotion of greater use of the Council's prerogatives to respond quickly to pressing issues, major events, emergencies and crises, using the expertise of the Council system.
- Improved sequencing of activities by the Council in order to make it more relevant in the context of major initiatives and meetings within the United Nations system.
- Openness of many Member States to revisit the segment structure and timelines, including stepping away from the automatic alternation between New York and Geneva towards a more New York-based approach and considering holding Council meetings on an ad hoc basis at other locations, for example, in Africa, to bring the Council closer to those it serves.

[1] This would in no way preclude Council discussion of other issues (taxation, public administration, narcotics, statistics, etc.) that subsidiary bodies might bring to its attention.

- Importance of keeping a strong focus on development issues, with special consideration for the concerns of small island developing States, least developed countries and landlocked developing countries within the restructured sessions.[2]
- Need to contribute to a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development and enhance the Council's key role in the coordinated follow-up of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits, taking into account also the other mandates of the Council in operational activities for development, coordination and oversight of the subsidiary bodies.
- Improvement and broadening of the scope of the Council's engagement with civil society and other relevant stakeholders, while reaffirming the intergovernmental character of its work.
- Need to promote complementarity and avoid duplication and overlap in the work of the Council, especially with respect to the work of the General Assembly and its Second and Third Committees, and to eliminate what no longer has a purpose.
- Need for more action- and solution-oriented outcomes of Council debates with greater focus on substance and less on textual negotiations and resolutions (quality versus quantity).
- Need for strong leadership of the Council through a strengthened Presidency.
- Full support for increased interaction between the Bureau and President of the Council and the Bureaux and Presidents of other organs of the United Nations and the subsidiary bodies of the Council and follow-up of this interaction in order to fill possible gaps.
- Need to encourage the funds and programmes and other subsidiary bodies to produce reports in summary form, with a focus on issues relating to the annual theme of the Council in order to facilitate more strategic discussions between the Council and the heads of the subsidiary bodies. This will help to reduce the reporting burden while maintaining effective oversight.
- Call to the Bureau of the Council to make preparations well in advance and jointly with the Secretariat, for important meetings with, for example, the international financial and trade institutions.
- Rationalization of the number of resolutions and avoid duplication of agenda items.
- Recognition that there is a clear link between the current review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 61/16 and other related processes in the General Assembly, notably the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, the high-level political forum[2] and the process on the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.
- Need for the Council to continue to be proactive in assessing the effectiveness of the current measures.

[2] To be defined in the context of the negotiations on the establishment of the high-level political forum.

E. How to succeed: Possible deliverables

13. In designing this new vision for the Council, there is a role for the General Assembly, the Council plenary, the Council Bureau and also the Secretariat.

Recommendations requiring a new General Assembly mandate

14. Recommendations include:

(a) **Segment structure**. Revise the current segment structure and timelines of the Council as follows: a coherence session in February/March, a humanitarian session between March and June, an integration session in May, and a "High-level Development Week" in June/July. By spreading the different sessions throughout the year, the Council would create stepping stones from the bottom (bring coherence at the operational level) to the top (give policy guidance at the normative level) and vice versa;

(b) **Coherence session**. A coherence session would focus on improving coordination among various United Nations system entities, ensuring that they complement each other and identifying linkages among their work. This session would be held after the meetings of the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes and would provide an opportunity for them and other entities to contribute through the main theme to the wider United Nations development agenda. A crucial function of this session would be to focus on the follow-up of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the coordination of operational activities at the field level;

(c) **Humanitarian session**. The humanitarian segment, which is widely considered to be successful, would be transformed into an independent and more visible "humanitarian session". The Council should also be able to convene ad hoc meetings on emergencies, especially with regard to humanitarian crises. This session could alternate between New York and Geneva, and other locations as necessary;

(d) **Integration session**.[3] The integration session would consolidate in a balanced manner the inputs provided at previous sessions by organizations, commissions, agencies and other actors linked to the Council in the social, economic, environmental and related fields in order to identify policy recommendations and orientations that lead to an integrated sustainable development agenda;

(e) **High-level Development Week**.[3] The high-level segment of the Council would be moved towards the end of the substantive session — rather than at the beginning — allowing momentum to build up in the preparatory process, and would be "rebranded" as the "High-level Development Week". The annual ministerial review and the Development Cooperation Forum as established in General Assembly resolution 61/16 have been successful and would remain an integral part of the Development Week. The denomination "High-level Development Week" speaks more to the imagination and gives greater political visibility. The Development Week needs to place enhanced focus on development cooperation and bring together a diverse base of participants to discuss development trends and emerging global development issues, such as inequality, youth, countries in special

[3] To be defined in the context of the facilitation of the high-level political forum.

situations and (sustainable) development financing, and promote mutual accountability in development cooperation. The Development Week will validate the work of the previous session of the Council and draw policy conclusions for the future;

(f) **Coordination and management issues**. Aspects such as reviews and discussions of the reports of subsidiary bodies, procedural reports of the functional and regional commissions and coordination discussions with the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) could be dealt with throughout the year within resumed sessions or in a dedicated stand-alone session. Separating this "housekeeping function" would allow the respective substantive sessions to focus on policy guidance and exchanges around an overarching theme, which should nurture the debate and high-level attendance;

(g) **Elections**. Revise the scheduling of the election of the members and Bureau of the Council, to align it with the new sessions, as per the proposed timeline;

(h) **Location**. Revisit the New York/Geneva alternation of Council sessions with a view to a more New York-based approach, including, however, the possibility of holding some meetings at other locations on an ad hoc basis to bring the Council closer to those it serves (link with main theme);

(i) **Countries in special situations**. Clearly define a platform to address the development concerns of small island developing States, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and Africa[3] within the restructured sessions;

(j) **International financial and trade institutions**. Promote an enhanced and more structured dialogue with international financial and trade institutions, including by holding the annual meeting back to back with the World Bank/IMF spring meetings, with a view to enhancing follow-up to and implementation of the outcome of the International Conference on Financing for Development and promoting coordination of the financing for development process with the intergovernmental process on sustainable development financing. The dialogue could contribute to the integration of the economic dimension, including through a review of trends in international macroeconomics, trade and finance as they relate to the Council's main theme;

(k) **Secretariat**. Enhance United Nations system-wide support in the preparation of Council meetings, including those responding to emergencies and crisis, to bolster the capacity of the dedicated Council support secretariat through a more flexible secretariat structure;

(l) **Annual ministerial review**. Facilitate a strengthened role for the annual ministerial review[3] as a tool for integrated and coordinated follow-up through an improved preparatory process at the global (policy drivers), regional (through the regional commissions) and national levels (implementation of national sustainable development strategies), improving the implementation of agreed goals. This would help in promoting the integration of the three dimensions at different levels;

(m) **Civil society**. Strengthen engagement with multiple stakeholders, for example, by holding the partnership and youth forums on a regular rather than an ad hoc basis.

Recommendations requiring a decision by the Economic and Social Council

From the plenary of the Economic and Social Council

15. Recommendations include:

(a) **Early election of the Bureau of the Council** (July-July cycle). The new Bureau of the Council should be elected no later than July;

(b) **Work programme/agenda**. Based on the early election, the Council should discuss and adopt a focused and streamlined agenda and an accompanying programme of work, to be proposed by the Bureau;

(c) **Main theme**. The streamlined Council agenda should include an overarching theme, to be proposed by the Bureau at the beginning of the Council cycle, that is aligned with the themes of the Development Cooperation Forum and the annual ministerial review;

(d) **Reporting**. Subsidiary bodies, funds and programmes and other relevant United Nations entities requested that more reports be submitted in summary form based on a template, with a focus on issues relating to the main theme, in order to inform each other's work and nurture overarching strategic discussions as well as rationalize their regular annual and quadrennial comprehensive policy review report. There was also a request for reports with improved policy content by subsidiary bodies, funds and programmes and other relevant United Nations entities, to be made available well in advance of Council meetings in order to give sufficient time to prepare its discussion;

(e) **Annual ministerial review**. Efforts should be made to improve the preparatory process of the annual ministerial review, through the regional commissions and United Nations country teams, by focusing on better dissemination of best practices and lessons learned and integrating regional and national perspectives. The current national voluntary presentations should be transformed into voluntary mutual reviews with appropriate technical guidelines, reporting system and strengthened secretariat support; this also has the potential to fulfil the requirement of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development for national and regional inputs;

(f) **United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination**. It is important to enhance the interface between CEB and the Council beyond current practices. The Executive Boards could be invited to recommend to the Council issues they would wish to be considered in a broader perspective (preferably at the joint request of different Executive Boards);

(g) **Rationalization of resolutions**. Efforts should be undertaken, in coordination with the General Assembly and its Second and Third Committees, to rationalize the number, scope and content of resolutions negotiated by the Council;

(h) **Civil society**. It is important to strengthen the engagement of civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders with the Council as partners in development.

From the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council

16. Recommendations include:

(a) **Programme of work**. Establish a programme of work at the beginning of the annual session in order to ensure synchronization with the wider United Nations agenda;

(b) **Preparation of meetings**. Take a more proactive role in the preparation of meetings, in regard to setting the agenda and maintaining contacts with the wider United Nations system;

(c) **Coordination with affiliated partners**. Coordination would include: arranging meetings with the Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees at an early stage in order to:

(i) Discuss the respective programmes of work (substance and calendars) and seek complementarities;

(ii) Maintaining regular contacts, including informal contacts, with the Bureaux of the Second and Third Committees and with the Peacebuilding Commission;

(iii) Arranging timely meetings between the President of the Council and the President of the General Assembly to promote coordination and coherence;

(iv) Commencing early and in-depth preparation of the meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions, funds and programmes, and subsidiary bodies, with a view to agreeing at an early stage on dates of meetings and agendas, focusing on important and well-targeted items relating to the Council's main theme, and better coordinating the substance of the discussions;

(d) **Better use of procedures/modalities**. This would include:

(i) Ensuring more interactive debates where each organization uses its specific know-how to contribute to the specific Council theme;

(ii) In the margins of the formal meetings, encouraging informal and flexible formats of interaction between representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions/specialized agencies and the Council;

(iii) Bringing in a broader range of expertise and knowledge by making the right choice of speakers and participants (State and non-State, private sector, trade unions, academics, think tanks and non-governmental organizations).

Recommendations for the Secretary-General

17. Recommendations include:

(a) Increase cooperation and coherence across the United Nations family (Secretariat, funds and programmes, and other relevant United Nations system entities) to give better support to the reformed Council to fulfil its functions;

(b) As the central hub of support for the Council, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat should draw upon the resources of the rest of the United Nations system and call on members of the United Nations family to produce specific contributions;

(c) Broaden support to the Council and its Bureau through:

(i) Better integration of the knowledge and expertise available within the wider United Nations machinery;

(ii) A flexible secretariat structure in support of Council activities, taking into account the issues discussed;

(iii) Greater secretariat support for the President of the Council.

F. Reflection on the linkage between the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum

18. A careful review of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development points to substantive convergence and synergies in the mandate and work of the Council with that of the high-level political forum, and indeed of the General Assembly, as they relate to the sustainable development agenda. This substantive convergence suggests the need for institutional coordination and complementarity if the sustainable development agenda is to be addressed in a coherent and integrated manner across the United Nations system. The pursuit of a "hybrid approach" to the forum is therefore to be welcomed.

19. In the context of the hybrid approach, it is important that the substantive and institutional linkages between the Council and the high-level political forum be clearly defined and delineated in order to maximize substantive coherence and cross-institutional synergies. Possible areas for consideration in the relevant processes include the following:

(a) An integrated thematic focus between the high-level political forum and the Council, where broad, periodic forum policy guidance by Heads of States and Government could be taken up by the entire United Nations development machinery. The annual ministerial segment under the auspices of the Council could be organized around a specific main theme proposed by the Bureau and taken up by the Council system. This thematic coherence should contribute to the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development as well as facilitate the Council's coordination role;

(b) Given the substantive convergence, it would be advisable to also have an institutional convergence to avoid overlap and duplication. In this regard, it is recommended to:

(i) **Link the meeting of the forum at the level of Heads of State and Government with the Council's implementation agenda**. The annual main theme put forward by the Council should contribute to the implementation of the outcomes of the meeting of the forum at the level of Heads of State and Government and to subsequent policy deliberations at the ministerial and Head of State levels;

(ii) **Link the ministerial segment of the forum with the High-level Development Week of the Council**. The outcomes of the Development Cooperation Forum and the annual ministerial review could be taken into account by the ministerial segment of the forum. The Council, currently tasked with the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (through its annual ministerial review) will thus have to transform into a post-2015 follow-up mechanism with poverty eradication and sustainable development as its overarching focus. Accordingly, the proposed Development Week could evolve into a "Post-2015 Development Week/Sustainable Development Week", becoming the "landing zone" of the forum's ministerial meeting segment;

(iii) **Link the meeting of the preparatory committee of the forum with the integration session of the Council**. The role of the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, as a key point of convergence between the Council and the high-level political forum, needs to be carefully considered in the context of the relationship between the two bodies, taking into account the coordination role of the Council and the need to draw on the strengths of the Council system. The Council could thus organize its proposed integration session as a universal special session of the Council in view of both integrating the three pillars and preparing the high-level political forum, accommodating the need for universality of the latter;

(iv) Throughout these different levels, a strong focus should be maintained on development issues, with special consideration for the concerns of countries in special situations.

20. Given the important linkage with the strengthening process of the Council, the high-level political forum should be seen as a process/forum, building on the strengths of other organs (General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council), and not as a new institution.

G. Areas requiring further reflection

21. The question of equitable geographical representation and the expansion of the membership of the Council was raised during the facilitation process and may require further discussion in a different context.

H. Moving forward

22. A phased approach to implementing the recommendations of the present report is proposed. Member States will need to negotiate a resolution to address the recommendations requiring a General Assembly mandate. Measures pertinent to the Bureau and the plenary of the Council should be brought to their attention for consideration and action as appropriate. The elements proposed by the Co-facilitators can provide a basis for the negotiations in the General Assembly. Actions to implement the recommendations at various levels should be pursued as soon as is practicable.